ENCORE

BOB & RAY

INTERVIEW

MAKING PEOPLE LAUGH

by Danny McCue

Bob Elliot and Ray Goulding have been in the business of making people laugh for forty-one years.

Together Bob and Ray have logged more radio airtime than any other comedian or comedy team. Simply put, the humor of Bob and Ray endures.

"You're here to see Bob and Ray?" asks the woman who answers the door of Elliot-Goulding-Greybar Productions, "Bob, the young man you're expecting is here to see you."

Bob emerges through a doorway. He's dressed head to toe in brown —brown turtleneck, slacks, socks, and shoes. I'm ushered into Ray's office, and find him seated, his feet up on top of his desk.

We begin our conversation by discussing the very beginning of their partnership.

Bob: *We were working alone in the morning as announcers, and it really was a case of amusing ourselves.*

Ray: *It just evolved really; we were just batting it back and forth. We'd use a voice, or do a character, and this was our door close (slams desk drawer, they both laugh).*

Bob: *It was either that or the telephone. Those were our two sound effects.*

Ray: *Those were the days my friend.*

Bob: *We'd be in there and make observations on things, or one of us would assume a character and the other would talk to him. We also did take-offs of the radio shows we listened to going home in the afternoon.*

Known to the world as Bob and Ray, the running order of their names came about out of necessity.

Bob: *They had a lot of shows with rhyming names; like* Backbay Matinee, *which was a two hour record show (on WHDH) in Boston.*

Ray: *It wasn't that somebody said Bob is taller, or funnier, or prettier, or anything; it was a rhyme* - Matinee with Bob and Ray—*it just worked.*

What is most amazing about those days is that they never wrote anything down in advance.

Bob: *We couldn't, we had a whole day's work besides.*

Ray: *We were staff announcers; we had other chores.*

If they went momentarily dry, finding themselves without anything funny to say, they'd just....

Bob: *Play a record.*

Ray: *But in the early days we didn't have anything like that. We just talked and stumbled on to something and if we didn't, so what? People knew you were off the top of your head so they were kind of "with" you anyway, if they listened to you at all. I often wondered if we were talking to ourselves and the engineer...but I guess not.*

One key element of their comic style was the effortlessness in which they deliver dialogue. As for their other strengths, I wanted the inside story. It was here that they turned the tables on me.

Ray: *Out strengths? Stunning looks. No, I don't know, maybe you could answer that better.*

I was trapped.

Bob: *Yeah, what is it? What's the appeal? I knew there was no way out. Do I venture into some abstract theory about surrealism and sound like a schmuck? Could I bluff and sputter a reply?*

Ray: *Is it the dirtyness that we include in our comedy? The Filth?*

I decided to play it safe by saying that their strengths are the way they treat the mundane and ordinary with humor.

Ray: *and make a big deal out of it.*

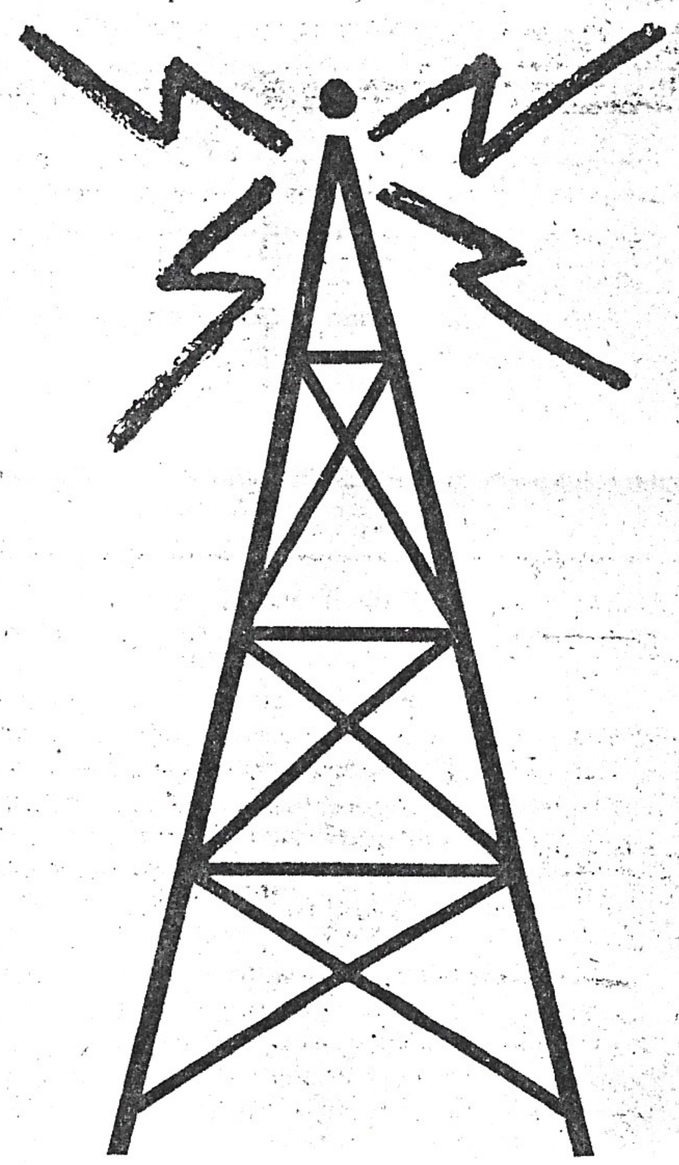
Danny: *You made a big deal out of it*

Ray: *That's right.*

Bob: *That's it.*

Ray: *That's it exactly.*

Whew.



Earlier in their careers they had three shows on three different stations running simultaniously in New York; which led them to adventures in another medium: television.

Ray: *It was an adjustment I guess. Actually, when you look back on those early shows, it was pretty primitive. We just thought of it as radio with a camera on.*

Bob: *They had primitive sets and three cameras.*

Ray: *And away you went. The lights were hot, and I mean blazing hot. We did the first color on N.B.C., a color experiment, and there was a big discussion on whether red or blue was funnier. Work on that one for a while.*

Born in Massachusetts, each was instilled with New England sensibilities. Both are quiet and reflective. Both found work at WHDH in Boston shortly after World War II.

They freely give credit to those who influenced them.

Bob: *Fred Allen, Laurel and Hardy from the movies...*

Ray: *I think in radio humor I emulated Snoopnagel and Bud more that anyone else - I loved these guys. You never heard of them, but those guys were hysterical.*

Words and the sound of words function as the core of their humor.

Ray: *We never went for that obvious hokey name like Archie Tech, the builder. We just went for what they were; not necessarily funny, but different names.*

Bob: *And they also had a kind of New England connotation, like Ballau is from Ballau Hall of Tufts, where my mother worked.*

A subject the duo likes to lampoon are soap operas.

Ray: *Soap Operas are a thing that's always been around. Recently, we've been doing* Garrish Summit, *which is more or less a takeoff on* Dallas.

Bob: *You don't really have to know the original except that it makes it better if you do. We did* Mary Backstage *longer than they did* Mary Noble. *We'd take that to whatever station we went to and that would be a chunk of our show.*

Ray: *I thought radio was so much better back then than it is now. Radio is dull now. It's all a bore. I mean, you've got all news, all talk, all music, all nothing, and call-in shows.*

Bob: *There used to be some good quiz shows on the radio that really made you use your immagination.*

Ray: *But you know the trouble with the call-in shows is that the same five guys call in everyday.*

The future of comedy in general is something that the team wonders about.

Ray: *I guess there's no place to be bad like we—we had the oportunity to be bad. I don't know where you can go to be bad anymoré.*

Bob: *I had a guy who works at the Marriot come up to me on the bus the other day and he says "I have a friend in New Jersey and he wants to be a comedy team - how do you..."*

Ray: *How do you start?*

Bob: *How do you do it? He says: Catch a Rising Star or one of those places? I said: I guess that's the only place you can. You can't start like we did, I mean we were lucky to...*

Ray: *We just fell into it.*

Bob: *But there's so many guys today that I say: I guess I'll be a comedian.*

Ray: *And they're manufactured and they don't have a basic sense of humor.*

Presently, Bob and Ray are doing television commercials; mostly local spots in the New England area. WNYC radio, FM 94 has begun broadcasting Bob and Ray Sunday nights at 7pm. The Best of Bob and Ray Volume Two, a collection of their recent material on audio cassette, will be in the stores soon.